

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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CHAPTER XLVI. MINNIE'S SCHEMES.

WHERE happiness reigns time flies fast enough, and at the Warren the days and hours seemed to have wings—that is, at least, for Beatrice and for her sisters, as the latter were devoting their energies to planning their bridesmaid dresses. Harry Laurence, during his frequent visits, found himself teased by his idol as to which were his favourite colours. He had no favourite colours or had never considered the subject; but Minnie made him find a choice, and made him also alter it so as to suit her various moods. Poor fellow, he was still framing his offer, and whenever he had reached the second sentence of this composition he found himself rebuffed by the idol, who expressed herself strongly in favour of either an officer or a duke. He feared the former more than the latter. The only duke within reach was a decrepit old gentleman, who had married twice and was accused of wishing to commit the folly a third time; but then, to think of that duke and of Minnie Gordon together was an impossibility. The officers, on the contrary, were many in number, and all, so Harry thought, terribly good-looking and polished. The poor fellow now began to study society novels, hoping to find there the help he required; but getting through a three volume novel was very hard work, and so very conducive to falling asleep. When he managed to keep awake, it required

some imagination to feel interested in the fortunes of purely imaginary people, and Harry possessed none. At last he came to the conclusion that he need only read the third volume, as the greatest number of offers and refusals could be found there; and though he was quite in the dark as to the plot, he tried to learn something about the best way of making an offer.

It was a week before Bee's wedding; Colin was at the Warren, and was chiefly occupied in taking long walks with Austin; for Minnie had declared that he was so much in the way that Austin must entertain him, and she had told Harry that the Captain was delighted to get a new listener for his tiresome old Indian stories.

"Do you dislike India?" asked Harry, suddenly inspired by this remark; he might perhaps come to the point.

"I expect I should dislike it, it is so hot," answered Minnie, who, now wrapped up in becoming furs, stood with Harry near the library window.

"I am glad," he said, unmercifully twisting the tassel of the blind as if to find comfort therefrom. "I mean, of course, I should have no chance of being ordered to India." He had those handsome officers in his mind's eye; but they, of course, always ran the risk of being "ordered to India."

"I don't suppose you will ever go there unless you are ordered there for your health," said Minnie, gravely.

"You're laughing at me, Miss Minnie; you know I'm awfully strong—I am really."

"Yes, you always look very strong; but one never knows. India may become a fashionable health resort and you may have to go," and Minnie laughed gaily.

"But I shall never be ill," said Harry, earnestly.

"It might be my duty to go, and then of course I should bear it," said Minnie, forgetting Harry and thinking only of a certain officer who, unlike his brothers in arms, was reported to be very rich, and whose regiment was to start for India in three months' time. This officer had lately been introduced to Minnie, and had made decided signs of being much smitten with her beauty.

"If it were your duty, of course; but if you married a man who always lived in England, for instance?"

Minnie suddenly became aware that it was coming. Just on the day when she least wanted it. How should she decide? It was really awkward. She looked at the door; but Harry had shut it on entering. No, she must go through with it, and stood looking so beautifully unconscious, appearing to take an immense interest in a far-off garden boy who was weeding the gravel path.

"Hang it—I can't say the right thing. Look here, Miss Minnie, you must know that I'm awfully in love with you, and if you will just say the word you'll not find any one who will be your slave as much as I shall; you won't, indeed."

Minnie weighed the present Harry and the absent rich officer—the latter was handsome and rather clever. Of the two, she would prefer him, though Harry was a very good fellow whom she would be able to rule completely. A month ago Harry would have had a better chance; but then a month ago he had not screwed up his courage to ask her!

"You don't mean what you say, I am sure," began Minnie, in the tone one uses to a child who has made an unwise remark.

"But I do; by Jove! I mean it, and heaps more. I've never thought of any one but you ever since the first day I saw you—upon my word I haven't, and I don't suppose you have guessed half my—"

Minnie's little hand was on his rough coat-sleeve; the very touch was madness to him. He seized it; he couldn't help it, in spite of seeing Minnie blush painfully and struggle a little to take it away.

"How very rude of you," she said; but her tone was gentle enough.

"I'm sure I don't mean to be; but there, you must say yes, or I shall be desperate. If it hadn't been for those—those officers, always hanging about here, I should have

spoken ever so long ago. Minnie, you don't mean no, do you?" The tone was really piteous, it would have touched a less interested heart than Minnie's.

"I—I am afraid I do. I mean that just now, before the wedding, I couldn't be troubling mother with my affairs, it might upset her. You won't mention it, will you, to any one? Let us be real friends, Mr. Laurence; it is so nice to trust people you know. One feels so comfortable, so much at ease with them."

"Friends, Miss Minnie!" Harry had not let go the tassel, though he found little comfort in it; he longed to fold Minnie to his rough heart and give her the whole of the deep affection he felt for her. She was not a woman to him, but an angel, a goddess, so intensely superior and beautiful that no penance was too great to undergo for her sake. "Friends! That's all very well if it leads to something else; but I can't be your friend always. I must be more than that; you must be my wife."

This plainness of speech shocked Minnie. Flirting was well enough, but it was not altogether pleasant when it ended in such scenes. She drew herself up with dignity, and half turned away, saying:

"I do not understand the word must."

Harry was awed for a moment by her manner, and then all the righteousness of his cause came upon him. Had she not often encouraged him, and made him believe that she might, in the end, be more to him than to others? Had she not even during the last week said a few soft words which had made him madly happy? Surely he could not have imagined everything—that could not be so—and yet what was she saying? He must plead once more.

"You made me believe that you cared a little," he said, in low, tremulous tones. "I know you did, and I believed you. I fancied that you might overlook all my roughness for the sake of the great love, and that in time—"

"We can always be friends, as I said before," repeated Minnie, apparently softening, though in reality she was once more weighing the future Squire and the officer in her balance of worldly advantage. Again the officer won the day. He really was an agreeable man, and Minnie preferred wit when accompanied by money. She even appreciated cleverness in a quiet way, though unable to respond to it much herself; but she could look deeply interested, and she found that went much

further with men than a great show of knowledge, whether real or pretended.

With Harry Laurence the exertion would all have to come from her, if she wanted to keep up an agreeable country house; she would get no help from her husband; so that he had his horses and dogs, he would leave her to entertain the guests. Nay, he might even be too much of a lover, and prefer to have her to himself without any agreeable surroundings. Then a country life would, under these circumstances, be insufferable. Bee was going to the neighbourhood of London, where she would find society in plenty, and where she would have all the attractions of the capital; but down here, buried in Harry's ancestral hall—no—surely the officer with money and wits would be far preferable, and she was sure that he was really smitten. However, the effort of the moment was to get rid of Harry without too much of a scene. She could not say that she had given him no encouragement, for, on the contrary, she had meant to have him if no one better turned up.

"Then you don't throw me over altogether," said Harry, presently, gazing at her with great despondency. "You won't tell me to leave off trying?"

"Indeed I do. You will soon find some one you will like as much."

"That is not true. I beg your pardon—I mean that I shall never change my mind—never; and if you marry any one else I shall enlist or do something awful."

Minnie smiled; she was not frightened by these words. She could not imagine Harry doing anything worse than ride more daringly than usual, or hunt oftener to drown his grief.

She wronged him; his heart was noble, though his light was not great. Such as it was, he acted up to it, even though it was but a rushlight.

"Won't you give me your hand, Harry?" said Minnie, softly. She had never called him by his name before, nor was she prepared for his sudden grasp of her hand and the hot kisses showered upon it.

"You do mean it, don't you? I will be your slave; you shall have but to command me. If you only knew what I feel for you," and the wretched man could not let go the small hand which was nearly lost in his great grasp. Minnie saw she had not gained her point; a feeling of slight fear came over her; this was more than she had intended.

"No, no, you don't understand, Harry?"

I really can't decide or settle anything now just before Beatrice's wedding. You must try and not show so much what you think and feel, because you are quite our right hand. Indeed, we must all behave naturally, and then after that, perhaps—I mean things will fit themselves in, won't they?" The little appealing look and gentle earnestness would have moved a man less in love than Harry.

"You mean I am a brute to vex you just now, and I believe I am; but if you know how I have been going about with all this—and much more—on my tongue; but you never would give me the chance, though you didn't seem altogether ignorant of my feelings."

"Please don't begin again like that—now; Frances will be wondering what we are doing. You will be reasonable, won't you—Harry?"

This appeal had its effect, and Minnie was allowed to get out of the room without a further scene. The worst was that Minnie hoped he meant to leave her altogether, for that afternoon the officer, Major Bond by name, was coming. She must find out quickly what he really meant before Harry was quite repulsed.

This conduct on Minnie's part was the result of Mrs. Gordon's education. If Minnie had been an apt pupil of the great principle which alone actuated her mother—the principle of doing the best for herself and her children—who can blame the girl very much?

Major Bond did come, and Minnie, a little excited by the morning episode, made herself more than charming. The Major was undoubtedly caught; and so the morning scene flitted away from the girl's mind, or she only said, "I did tell him it couldn't be," whilst with word and look she as much as told the Major she was willing to be wooed and won.

That evening she was unusually pleasant and good-tempered to Beatrice. She was soon going to eclipse her younger sister, so she could now afford to sympathise with her.

"Only a week to-day, Bee. I hope your dress will come back from London to-morrow. I believe we shall quite outshine you. I wonder whether I should look nice in white—in a bride's dress, I mean."

Beatrice had been saying good night to Colin in the library; he was going away the next day, only to come back on his wedding day. She was very happy in a

quiet way now, only longing to get the fuss over and to go away with him—for life. She fancied her mother looked terribly worn with it to-day; Minnie was the only person who apparently enjoyed the turmoil, for Austin did not relish it at all. He, too, wanted to get away—to fly back to Unterberg or else to plunge into hard work. This idleness was more trying than he knew how to bear; he had even made up his mind to tell his mother, and ask her leave to seek out Grace.

A look in Minnie's eyes suddenly made Bee guess that something unusual had happened. She suddenly stopped her sister, and said, smiling:

"Minnie, you don't mean that you have made up your mind to have Harry Laurence, do you? I am glad."

"Harry Laurence! How silly you are, Bee. No, dear, of course not. Poor Harry Laurence, he is very nice for a friend. Don't you see, Bee, who is really in love with me?"

Bee felt suddenly indignant.

"Major Bond, I suppose you mean; he has not known you long, and I am sure Colin does not think he is——"

"Whatever you do, Bee, don't quote Colin to me; it is more than I can stand, though I am prepared to stand a good deal from my future brother-in-law."

"You must manage your own affairs, I know, Minnie; only——"

"Don't; you have become nearly as moralising as Colin. Anyhow, mother will not have the fuss of a double wedding. I suppose Major Bond would take precedence of Captain Grant." Minnie laughed and looked contentedly at herself in the large pier-glass.

"Good night, Minnie; I have so much to do before I get to bed, so please leave me."

The two girls were talking in Bee's room.

"Why, you have mother's bureau in your room; why is that?" said Minnie, turning away.

"Mother doesn't want it; she thought it would make the room look prettier. Is Austin in the library still?"

"Yes, discussing some wonderful plans with Colin, and there they may perhaps be found to-morrow morning. Well, good night, I see you don't want me."

"Poor Harry Laurence," sighed Bee, as her sister shut the door, "he has had the same fate as the Curate. Oh, dear."

Bee sighed over what she saw wrong,

knowing that she personally could do no good, and that she would soon be away from it all, breathing a purer atmosphere, where self did not come first, and where one's neighbour was not quite so much a machine to be used for one's own benefit, as seemed to be the case in her own home.

"But I wish Austin were happier! If I could but help him; but how can I? I seem to be the only really happy one, and yet I don't deserve it half so much as he does."

Then Bee devoted herself to finishing some letters and sorting some of her books. She liked to collect all her childish treasures; they should make the new house really home, into which her past should enter and assimilate as well as her future. Then she devoted herself to her letters without further thought of lovers. The little bride-elect was quiet and contented in the midst of the fuss around her.

MOODS AND FANCIES.

A MAN'S moods and fancies are the sauces and condiments of his life. Some of them he likes amazingly, and those he uses as much as he may, without injury to himself; at times, indeed, to his own harm. Others he has no liking for, and these he stunts is their birth with a curt "No, thank you."

Existence would be tiresomely tame if we were not constantly visited by these capricious little notions of things. It would assume a complexion of "marbled oneness," as devoid of the mere suggestion of sensation as the stars that come into view night after night, when the sun is out of the way. I have, indeed, heard of a man with a terrific imagination conjuring up to himself scenes of conflict and activity upon these pleasant little lamps above us. But he was an exception to the mass of mortals. I, for my part, could as soon figure to myself a condition of life in Mars or Aldebaran, in which courts and kings, archbishops, railway accidents, and Stock Exchange excitements were essential features, as assure myself that the gas-jets at this moment scorching my crown are living entities, friends or foes to each other, and with strong views on the subject of electricity.

Of course I know well enough that it is philosophic and admirable to be calm in all circumstances; to be indifferent whether one is alive or dead, and to stir not one

eyelash upon intimation of calamity of the direct kind. Counsel of this kind commends itself completely to my reason. But the unregenerate part of me has no sympathy with it, rather scoffs at it, and twits it with being unfit company for the common impulses of my nature. I prefer, therefore, when I hear news of disaster to my estate, bodily or financial, to put my hand to my brow, utter an exclamation of unfeigned anguish, and wish strenuously for the moment that I had never been born. If I could shed a tear or two, and I knew they would relieve me, I should at such a time feel under no restraint in the matter. The Greeks cried when they wanted to cry; why, then, should not I?

The philosopher in real life is by no means so stately a character as he would fain conceive himself to be. If he offers his hand and his phantom of a heart to a fair maid, and candidly avows that he will be well able to bear a refusal from her, she may like to put him to the test. Nor will the world in such a case have sought but a mock to tender him as a tribute of praise for his manly stoicism, supposing—which may be doubted—he acts well in harmony with his ideal.

It is only over the troubles of my friends that I can show the genuine philosophic spirit. I can then even do more. Though I am not iron-hearted, and though I, of course, wish them well rather than ill, yet when one or another of them unbosoms himself of his distress, with woful countenance and adjectives of anger against the arbiter of human events, I can not only bear it like a martyr, but often the smile comes unbidden to my lips. His wife may be dead, or his baby a monster, his agent may have pilfered him of twenty thousand pounds, or his new book may be termed by the reviewers "the worst ever written by the present author"—it is all one. Somehow the events fail to touch me, and seem to be scenes in an impersonal comedy of disappointment, rather than so many shocks upon a sensibility which responds to them with a quiver of pain.

Some of our moods are like sunbeams—so slight, and light, and bright, and yet so precious. We cannot grasp them or order them to do any one thing for us; nevertheless, they are of more consequence to us than a great swelling event that the newspapers would chronicle in monstrous type. They glide upon us without a sign or note of warning, cheer us, breed new hopes

in our hearts, set a tender halo round the head of our troubles and anxieties, and then they are gone, and we are much as we were before, save for the memory of them.

Obviously it is wise to make the most of these transitory little visitors while we have the chance. If we give them a genial welcome, they may stay the longer with us; else they are apt to slink out of us very soon. An Elizabethan poet once sang:

The lesse I love, I live the lesse.

The man who is steeled against moods and fancies, who goes on his way towards his goal without so much as a look to the right hand or the left, who stops his ears to the siren voice of the world's mirth and music, and to whom idleness is a sin, may accumulate a large sum of money; but I do not envy him. The fewer the moods and fancies, the duller the life, and the man who knows nothing of them is wholly lacking in that noble faculty, imagination, which is better than one or two of the senses.

With a little practice one may apply one's words and fancies to very serviceable purpose. They are capital armour in conflict with the stern grim realities of life, which meet us with mighty frowns on their ugly faces. The light and airy mood makes game of their very ugliness, and urges us to smile where, before it came upon us, we were in a shiver of fear. "What!" the dear elf whispers to us, "you were afraid of that corrugated guy! Supposed he would drive that rotten old spear of his into your ribs, or sit upon you with his bloated carcase, and so crush you flat as a pancake? Fudge! It's all his manner; nothing more. He can't help looking such an ogre; and really he's not half bad at heart. Just watch me." Then he steals grinningly up to the great glowering giant, and begins to tickle him in the arm-pit, or punch his stomach, or push straws into his ears. It is rare at such a time to see the ugly old thing break out into a smile; and you, too, the looker-on, begin to perceive that, thanks to the alchemy of Master Mood, even the most formidable of our various difficulties are by no means so blood-curdling in reality as they seemed.

Some day I hope we shall have discovered the secret place in which Dame Nature keeps all the moods and fancies. Once we get possession of that key we shall do

well. The invention of the steam-engine will seem but a weak element in human progress compared with that. Why, we shall then have solved the riddle which has made the sapient in all ages pucker their brows and say at last: "I give it up; it's too hard for me." At least, it seems so. But, of course, with our customary want of discretion, if we were so lucky as to have the run of the cupboard we should one and all indulge in a debauch of the imagination, which could hardly fail to end somewhat disastrously. Doubtless we should learn better after a while; we should climb by the ladder of our errors into the very heaven of perfection, and the topmost rungs would all be the work of the sweet moods and fancies that we had forced to acclimatise among us.

It will be very charming to live in this era of human gladness. Every trouble and annoyance will have its antidote in the cupboard; and so existence will be but a steady ascent from pleasure to pleasure. Criminal codes and madness will then have passed away from a world which has outgrown them, just as in the year 1892 it has pretty generally got beyond the stage of tattooing and feathers as an equivalent of Bond Street tailoring.

Even as it is, some of us have a foretaste of this time of jubilee. Our moods and fancies are more to us than those of other men are to them. We can coax them to put off their ephemeral nature, and tarry with us a little longer than it is their fashion ordinarily to tarry in the human heart. As far as they themselves, and the pleasure they occasion, are concerned, this is well. But, upon the whole, the temptation that comes with them is so appallingly strong, and has such a tendency to unfit us for intercourse with a world not yet redeemed as we flatter ourselves we are redeemed, that our state is not entirely desirable. The temptation itself is not iniquitous; yet, proved by its fruits, it had better be combated than welcomed. It says to its victim: "Come, my friend, you have proved to your satisfaction that present-day life—objective life, you know—is more of an evil than a good. Therefore, turn your noble back upon it; take my sweet opiate of the imagination, and spend the rest of your time here below in a dream of moods and fancies, by the side of which the joys of the old Arabian Nights shall pale in magnificence. Say good-bye to the disagreeable real incidents of life. Give up

wife and children, the pursuit of lucre, pleasure, and so forth, and live henceforth in fancy alone." It is not at first sight an unpleasant programme; but when you come to look into it, you perceive that it is really nothing less than an invitation to Colney Hatch. Until we get the key of the cupboard, and have a school of experienced professors of moods and fancies to teach us how to acquire and in what measure to use them, it is fatal to follow this lure.

I have said that one's moods and fancies may be coerced into harness, and so turned to practical account. I must be personal in proof of this.

Some of my lady friends think, I believe, that it is as easy for me to evolve pages of magazine print from my brain as it is for them to unreel cotton. They are much in error. At times, it is as hard as digging in frozen ground, and sometimes cutting against iron is nothing to it. But one learns after a while, when the brain has its fits of obstinacy, not to fret and fume, declaim against the universe, cast dark looks at the innocent babe in his cot, and so on. When these moments arise, the judicious man lights his pipe, or goes a long walk—no matter whether ten or a hundred miles—or sings a song, or makes a table, or thinks of his next Masonic banquet, and leaves the brain to sulk itself out.

One may also do better still. After a little perseverance and close study of cerebral phenomena, one may really make capital out of this very obstinacy and apparent sterility, which seemed to menace one with ruin in the extinction of one's abilities for work.

How? you ask.

Well, in this way. You learn at length not to press your brain, much against its will, to continue to wind forth those chapters of the sensational novel, for which Messrs. Print and Paper have promised you a thousand pounds. It turns dull and refuses to bring your hero, Sir Launcelot, out of that difficulty of his with the ten or twelve lions in a dignified and rational way. Very good! But, on the other hand, it is in admirable trim for a sonnet on "A Walk in a Graveyard at the Witching Hour," an elegy on "The Death of a Tame Cat," or a ballad about "An Overful Stomach." Common sense, then, bids you ease it of the uncongenial task, and set it to work upon what it feels able to do.

Thus, in time, one finds the way to have

as many strings to one's literary bow as there are moods and humours for the animated human corporation. This is good in a multitude of ways. Some of them are so patent that they need not be indicated—the pecuniary profit, for instance. Instead of indulging in delirious visions of ruin or insanity—Swift's fancy about beginning to decay at the top, like a tree blasted by lightning, being especially fond of bothering one—this mood may then be turned to excellent account by writing a shilling "horrible" of the most awful kind. Thus you not only chime in with nature, thereby transforming your discord into a harmony, but you work off your bad humour and dyspepsia very advantageously.

I am inclined to think that by this method of life the literary man really enlarges and develops his personality to the utmost possible degree. Think what a multitude of the sides of life he is thus able to test and appreciate. He can sympathise with poor Bessie Love's disappointment on the eve of her marriage—the trousseau all prepared upstairs—just as heartily as with Mrs. Frump the house-keeper's loud, unmitigated grief because her master, Sir Somebody or other, of Something Manor, has quite forgotten to mention her in his will, though she has grown grey in his service. He knows just how Uncle Frederick feels when he is about to have an apoplectic fit; for has he not, by analysis and synthesis, detailed on paper his own sensations after, shall we say, a furious supper, very late, of roast goose, lobster, and much else, with, for a beverage, what the waiter calls "old port"? He can even venture to say that he is not unfamiliar with the kind of anxiety which pretty little Mrs. Youngbride experiences when her dear baby, aged a trifle under a year, is menaced with measles or convulsions. It is a kindred sensation to that which he feels when an "opus magnum" is suddenly cast back upon his hands by an unappreciative publisher.

In this way we gentry of the pen trot through life, sounding most strings of the gamut, and producing more or less music—and the more by chance—as we go.

As professions may be estimated in this age, ours is not so very bad a one. It has been well vilified by certain of the laggards in the race; but, upon reasonable consideration, it seems to merit condemnation no more than other professions. The failures among the other professions and trades no doubt say unpleasant things

about the methods of livelihood in which they have failed to succeed; but they do not print them. That is one of the reasons why our younger brethren apprentices to pen, ink, and paper, and the moods and fancies, and solid powers within them, must not put such serious faith in the myriad of doleful paragraphs against the literary life which may be culled without difficulty from the bookshelves of any little library.

A reasonable devotion to the moods and fancies which our kind mother Nature sends us now and again is as good as an annuity. This is especially the case when we have passed the heyday of life, when we prefer to dally in leisurely mode with the milder pleasures which are left to us, trying them upon the tongue, and saying, "Hum! ha! now is not that good?" "What a delightful flavour this has!" or "This, though piquant enough, is certainly not for a man of my time of life."

One notices this more among the ladies than the gentlemen of one's acquaintance. An old maiden lady, with a blameless record—and there are a surprising number of them—ought really to be in sweet bonds to her fancy. Often, indeed, she is. The belated colour in her cheeks and the youthful brightness of her eyes tell of it. What is it to her that she is alone in the world—for a parcel of nephews and nieces with thoughts of her bank stock, her silver spoons, and jewellery, can hardly be said to count? She can shut her eyes, and lo! the present is exchanged for the past which might have been. It is a vain mood, but no matter; it makes her very happy, and she is none the worse for it afterwards. It is a debauch of fancy alone. The little mortals with large heads and beady eyes, whom she sees rolling on the floor at her feet, or clinging to her knees, have a striking resemblance to her—the same contour of cheek, and eyes of the same shape. Of course it is preposterous, for at that early age a child but seldom has any definite quality of feature. It is nothing but Fancy, dancing on her reason and kicking up its dapper little heels in her decorous sensorium. Fancy, too, is accountable for the presence of the dark gentleman with a long moustache and a pointed beard who stands at her side with his hand on her shoulder, and looks with the vague happiness of a husband upon the uniform little mortals who call him "dadda" with a splutter, even as they call her "mother."

No man knows what the future will bring forth for his enjoyment or unwilling digestion. If Cervantes had not been put in prison, we should never have had "Don Quixote"; nor should we have had "Don Quixote" though Cervantes was imprisoned, had he not been a favoured camping-ground of the moods and fancies which are like good fairies to a lonely heart. The great Spaniard was wrong when he wrote that serene skies, the babble of brooks, and rural scenes are of themselves a surpassing inspiration to the soul. He was debarred from these, and yet he wrote as he could not have written if he had been free to set one foot before another in what direction and as far as he pleased.

The farther a man is banished from the distracting hum and stir of the very forge of human life, the broader the scope for the moods and fancies he has been wont to entertain. They are jealous little elves, though their jealousy seldom takes injurious form. What they most love is to have undisputed sway in a soul. That granted, they will strive like no human thing to reconcile their residence to its new occupants. A fig for the hurly-burly outside, when there is peace, or mirth, or sweet song, or engrossing picture upon picture within. I would rather be a vagabond in rags, with a few coppers in the one sound patch of my unmentionables, having at the same time a snug company of fancies in my soul, than a Croesus of Threadneedle Street, who feels bored when he is not eating or drinking, or being amused in public places, and upon whom the mere thought of ruin comes like a stab of cold steel in the side.

THE CITY OF PORCELAIN.

It is a well-known fact that the subjects which possess most interest for the general reader are those with which he is best acquainted. We all enjoy reading accounts of people we know, and descriptions of places we have visited. In this respect we are like children who clamour for the oft-heard Cinderella or Puss in Boots, and utterly despise the modern fairy tale, even though it be constructed on the most scientific principles. Therefore it is unnecessary to make any apology for writing about a place that will be so familiar to most of my readers as the City of Porcelain, alias the Florence of the Elbe, alias

Semmelstadt, in allusion to the excellence of her bread. Of all the honorary titles that have been bestowed upon the Saxon capital, the one by which I have chosen to designate her is surely the most suggestive, for the name of Dresden is sufficient to conjure up in the mind a vision of the daintiest shepherd pair that ever were born in Arcadia. He with sky blue embroidered coat, lace ruffles, and powdered hair; she in an attitude demurely coy, her overskirt looped up and filled with flowers, from which a few dropped petals cling to her quilted petticoat. How pink and pretty are this porcelain pair, and, alas, how perishable!

But Dresden's china is perhaps the least of all her charms. She has attractions for the musician, the artist, the antiquarian, the invalid, and, last, but not least, for the harassed parents of an ignorant family. Only the idler, the mere pleasure-seeker, ever finds the time pass slowly within her hospitable walls. He feels like the little truant in the fable, who could persuade none of the animals to come and play with him. Not that the population of Dresden, whether native or foreign, are in danger of becoming dull boys by too incessant indulgence in work. The "gemuthliche" Saxons understand the value of recreation as well as the dignity of labour, and know better than most nations how to enjoy themselves in a rational, wholesome way.

Let me attempt to sketch some scenes from the daily life which flows along so quietly and busily in the City of Porcelain. The reader who is as familiar with this life as the writer may find pleasure in having old memories revived, prejudices shared, and impressions verified. Let us for the moment imagine that we are a couple of students who have taken up our quarters in one of those "first-class family pensions"—their name is legion—which are situated in the English and American quarter. To stay in an hotel would imply that we are merely birds of passage, and to take a furnished "étage" would show an unsociable disposition, a lack of interest in the life that is going on around us. Besides, hotels and furnished flats are expensive luxuries, while the modest "pension" is not beyond the reach of even the most slender purse. A "friendly" room, breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper for five pounds a month, and the extras kept down with the most rigid conscientiousness; no wonder that the sight of our first bill upsets all our preconceived

ideas of landladies and their little ways.

Our "pension" contains between twenty and thirty inmates, representing among them seven or eight separate nations. Yet there is no suggestion of the Tower of Babel, for the English and Americans speak their own tongue, and all the rest talk German more or less fluently. But, if there is no resemblance to Babel, there are, it must be confessed, distinct reminiscences of the Zoo. The law which ordains that no music is to be heard between ten p.m. and seven a.m. may appear at first somewhat arbitrary in the eyes of the freeborn Briton, but even the most red-hot Social Democrat, after a week in "pension," would allow that this restriction was not only excusable, but absolutely necessary. It might seem that even during the lawful hours the sound of half-a-dozen different instruments playing at one and the same time half-a-dozen different pieces in as many keys and measures, would be a little trying, and so it undoubtedly is at first, but nature has a most excellent faculty for accommodating herself to annoyances which cannot be removed. Besides, we, of course, are art students, and either take our part in the Dutch concert to the best of our ability, or else make our whole neighbourhood unsavoury with the smell of our oils and varnish.

It is winter when we arrive, the best of the four seasons for steady work. In spite of dark, cold mornings, we begin the day at so virtuous an hour that we should grow insufferably conceited did we not know that all our neighbours have at least equal grounds for self-complacency. Punctually at seven-thirty the hard-worked yet ever cheerful Marie bounces into our room, bearing a tray containing our frugal breakfast of "Sem-meln"—white rolls—and coffee. In less than three minutes Marie has, by some magic of her own, transformed the sepulchral-looking white china stove into a very fair imitation of a flaming, fiery furnace. The stove is an excellent institution in the hands of those that know and understand its ways; but the foreigner finds that to master the art of coaxing it out of sulky fits, coercing it in stubborn moods, and training it into habits of cheerful submission, is in itself a liberal education.

But to return to our experiences during a "pension" morning. By nine o'clock the daily concert has begun. The 'cello and the violin are loudly protesting against the

tyranny of the bow, the piano is torn to pieces with scales, and the human voice is trying to outdo the flute in feats of acrobatic skill. The next three hours pass all too quickly, for we, like the rest of the world, have our all-absorbing pursuit, be it music, china painting, or the study of the German tongue. But at twelve o'clock, unless we happen to be wrestling with a particularly tough passage, or the light is too good to be lost, we knock off work, and join the army of "bummeln," who jostle one another at all hours of the day upon the narrow pavement of their favourite Prager Strasse.

It is midwinter, and there has been snow enough during the last few weeks to reduce any English parochial body to a state of helpless imbecility, were they called upon to cope with it. But the Dresden authorities are more than equal to the occasion. The snow is scraped up into banks, leaving ample room for the traffic, and then, by degrees, is carted away in trains of innumerable trucks to some region where, presumably, its arrival causes no inconvenience to the inhabitants. At any rate, the streets of the capital are cleared, and the ubiquitous tram, the infrequent droschky, and the big dogs, who are the Saxon substitute for the coster's donkey, go their way rejoicing.

As we "bummeln" down town, our attention is constantly arrested by the attractive windows of the picture and china shops. In the last-named it is sad to notice that the popularity of the pastoral lovers has been, in a measure, eclipsed by the meretricious charms of the modern ballet-dancer. In spite of the studied grace of her attitude, and the filmy gossamer of her petticoats, the latter is not half so pretty as the modest shepherdess, and far more fragile. But there are many other, and more artistic specimens of Meissen work. The eye grows weary with admiring the tall vases ornamented with raised rose-buds and forget-me-nots, the dessert plates bearing Watteau landscapes on their centres, and bordered with porcelain filagree, and the plaques containing copies of the most famous pictures in the gallery, from the Sistine Madonna in all her glory down to Hübner's pretty children on a pair of sleeve-links.

At length we reach the Schloss, and, taking the thoroughfare through the picturesque courtyard, we presently emerge upon the Theater Platz, with the rococo Roman Catholic church upon our right,

the Zwinger Palace to the left, and in front of us the beautiful little Opera House. The latter is our destination, for on no account must we omit taking tickets for to-night's performance of the "Meistersinger," at which we shall have the pleasure of renewing our acquaintance with "die Malten," Gudehus, and Scheidemantel, all of Baireuth fame. This business concluded, let us turn aside into the Zwinger, where we may stand and sun ourselves for a while before the glowing canvases of Correggio, Titian, and Paul Veronese. It is not long, however, before the artificial heat of the building drives us to the long "dormitory" corridor, there to seek refreshment from the cool greys and browns of the Dutch and Flemish masters.

On leaving the gallery we may, if we please, join a party which is going the round of the celebrated Grüne Gewölbe. In these treasure caves we may feast our eyes upon jewels, antiquities, and nick-nacks sufficient in value to ransom all the crowned heads of Christendom. If, however, our tastes are of a more classic type, we may cross the B ühlische Terrasse, and wander through the fine new building that contains the Royal collection of plaster casts. It is an interesting collection; but casts are chilly company at the best of times, so perhaps it is better to turn our steps towards the Johanneum, where weapons of offence and weapons of defence are arranged in dangerous proximity to the fragile and peaceful porcelain.

In the armoury may be seen specimens of almost every invention for the shedding of blood and the dealing of wounds and death. There are the straightforward spears and cross-bows of ancient warfare; there is the fiendish spring-dagger, that never failed to inflict a mortal wound by multiplying itself into four as soon as it pierced the body; and, worst of all, there is a deadly mitrailleuse, captured in the Franco-Prussian war.

A more complete contrast to the harnessed knights and their prancing steeds can scarcely be imagined than the sight which meets our eyes when we enter the rooms dedicated to the superb porcelain collection—the most complete, probably, in the whole world. Every nation which has ever devoted any attention to the ceramic art is splendidly represented, except, indeed, Great Britain, which makes but a sorry show. Whole cabinets are filled with specimens of the rarest colours and glazes, the secret of which has long been lost. The ordinary

collector would think himself blessed indeed did he possess but one broken fragment of such manufactures, which are worth literally more than their weight in gold. Here are the six colossal jars which Augustus the Strong, most ardent of bric-à-brac hunters, bought of Frederick the Great, paying for them with a regiment of young Saxon giants. The price seems high, but, taking into consideration the magnificence of these jars, which could comfortably accommodate half-a-dozen of the forty thieves, it can scarcely be called excessive. Here, again, may be seen examples of every period of Meissen art, from the first attempts to convert the Saxon clay into primitive pottery, up to the elaborate bouquets with transparent petals, dewy leaves, and pollen-covered stamens which might deceive even the most astute of bees.

But too long a study of these poems in porcelain is enough to convert even harmless, innocent sight-seers like ourselves into rabid china-maniacs. We must tear ourselves away, and hurry home if we would be in time for that most important function, the Mittagessen. At this meal we shall make acquaintance with the international family of which we have become members for the time being. Apart from their tongue, it is not difficult to single out our own compatriots. There is no mistaking that eminently respectable-looking family—father, mother, and round-cheeked, innocent-eyed daughters, who all look as though they were making desperate efforts to smother their innate ideas of conventionality. Equally unmistakable are the two spinster sisters. With their woolly shawls upon their shoulders, and their aggressive caps upon their heads, they look as though they had never known any more exciting experiences than a school-feast or a Christmas-tree. Yet it would be difficult to mention any place from Jerusalem to Madagascar that these wandering sheep have not visited, and they have curiously correct memories for the prices and varying degrees of comfort of the hotels which they have patronised in every corner of the globe.

America is represented by a group of her brilliant daughters, well dressed, self-possessed, and enjoying in high degree the enviable social quality of *savoir faire*. Roumania has sent us a pair of sisters, olive-skinned, and Oriental-eyed; Russia, an ancient baronin, armed with an ear-trumpet; Finland, a blonde youth, who is studying Saxon forestry; Greece, a musical

count with an unpronounceable name; and Norway the most fascinating of maidens, who sings like a professional, draws like an artist, dances like a ballet-girl, and is, withal, as simple and unaffected as a child.

It is needless to say that the feminine element largely predominates. Indeed, in the triviality of its gossip and the pettiness of its quarrels, our "pension" is not unlike a convent, to which a few members of the male sex have been admitted by special favour. There is a curious sameness about the conversation that takes place, day after day, over the rice-soup, roast veal, compôte, and "Mehlspeise." The changes are rung upon theatrical gossip, Conservatoire gossip, and studio gossip—topics which appear to possess an inexhaustible interest for the majority of the company.

The afternoon may be spent in skating on the big "Teich" in the Grosser Garten, or in a constitutional among the pines and silver birches of the vast and lonely "Haide." But afternoon tea is far too important a consideration to be forgotten, for since the opera begins at six-thirty, supper must be postponed till ten, and listening to Wagner is hungry work. Therefore, forsaking the "pension" tea, with its flimsy "Bretzel" and insufficient "Zwieback," let us pay a visit to one of the many Conditoreien that tempt virtue in every quarter of "Sammelstadt." Here we may revel in tall tumblers of coffee "mit Schlagsahne" (whipped cream) and make acquaintance with many strange delicacies, such as the rum-flavoured Nusskuchen, the insipid Sand-torte, the Christmas Stollen, the Saxon versions of our English "Bun" and "Plom-kake," and, last but not least, the ever popular Pfannkuchen. The Pfannkuchen is occasionally to be met with in England, but it really deserves to become a national institution. It has not, as its name would seem to imply, anything in common with our British pancake; indeed, it might more properly be entitled a "Surprise Bun." In outward appearance it is most unpromising, resembling nothing so much as a large baked potato; but the enterprising explorer into its interior may depend upon being rewarded, sooner or later, by "striking jam." Hence the secret of its success.

But little time is required to prepare for the opera, since to don evening dress would be to make ourselves far too conspicuous. As we are regular theatre goers

we do not patronise the aristocratic parquet, or first rang; nor the genteel second; nor even the respectable third rang; we join the great majority of our compatriots in the humble but "gemuthlich" fourth rang, where, for the moderate sum of eighteen pence, we may enjoy a reserved seat from which the music can be heard to the best advantage, and a comprehensive, if somewhat foreshortened view of the stage and the singers be obtained.

The "star" system does not prevail at Dresden; but the principal soloists are thoroughly conscientious and "routinirte" artists. The chorus is fresh and well drilled, the operas admirably mounted, and the orchestra nothing short of perfection. We, in the fourth rang, form by far the most enthusiastic and sympathetic section of the audience. We note all the "points," and do all the applause, though we have too much regard for artistic unity to insist upon encores. In case this should catch the eye of an English manager, it may be as well to mention that the cloak-room fee is a fraction over twopence, and that programmes cost one penny.

If the night is fine, everybody walks home from the theatre, except the Royal party, who flash past us in almost mediæval state, the flaming torches of the Court footmen giving an air of barbaric splendour to the scene. We "Fremden" stream through the streets in a compact mass to our own quarter and the supper that is awaiting us. The latter is a frugal meal, consisting of the never-failing "kalte Aufschnitt," or slices of cold meat and sausage, together with brown bread and lager beer. Perhaps the simplicity of this meal accounts for the fact that it never disturbs our slumbers, even though partaken of at ten p.m.

Evenings at home are events of rare occurrence in the Saxon capital, the more so since the "pension" programme contains no provision for the entertainment of the lover of domesticity. Therefore, if opera begins to pall, we must cross the water and seek a refuge within the hospitable walls of the little Schauspielhaus. Here the student of German may take a conversation lesson while straining his ears to catch the dialogue of a Lustspiel by Blumenthal, or a Schwank by von Moser. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of modern German dramatic art is the complete absence of all staginess. However improbable the plot may be, the treatment,

the character drawing, and the interpretation are all instinct with realism—the realism, that is, of upper middle-class life. Impecunious Lieutenants, young doctors and lawyers, homely shrewd-tongued Hausfrauen, and innocent Backfische play their parts with absolute naturalness and simplicity on one side the footlights, while their prototypes on the other side appear highly to enjoy the amusing and good-humoured satire which is levelled at their own short-comings and foibles.

Of concerts there is a most bewildering variety, from the oratorio, the pianoforte recital, and the Lieder Abend, down to the popular smoking concert, where, for the sum of sixpence, we may listen to a good orchestral performance of a programme, which, in any other country but Germany, would be considered classical. Here we may sup, smoke, talk to our friends, and, in short, spend a social evening, for the music is looked upon chiefly as a pleasant accompaniment to good cheer and good fellowship. Although the company is decidedly mixed, consisting as it does of all sorts and conditions of men, from the respectable Herr Papa with his wife and family, down to the most light-hearted of students, the behaviour of every member is invariably decent and decorous. This must be attributed partly to the fact that the Saxon Hans has but few characteristics in common with the Anglo-Saxon cousin "Arry." As a child Arry has been led to believe that all amusement is worldly and sinful, consequently, when he comes to man's estate, an uneasy conscience compels him to do his best to justify this idea. As long as he is behaving quietly and respectably, he cannot believe that he is really enjoying himself. His cousin Hans, on the other hand, has been brought up upon wholesome amusement, of a kind which can be shared with his mother and sisters. Hence he has never learnt to look upon rowdiness as the most indispensable element of pleasure.

Hitherto we have been dealing with life in the City of Porcelain during the long months of winter. But spring comes at last, the ideal spring of the poets, such as we read of but never experience in England. Our Saxon ancestors must have brought with them the conventional conception of this season, to which we have clung with touching fidelity through centuries of ill-usage and disappointment. In Germany the maiden is supposed to arrive on the twenty-first of March, and though

not always very punctual, she comes to stay, instead of playing hide-and-seek with winter. With a faith in her good intentions which seems little short of miraculous in English eyes, the Saxons put away their furs, take out their double windows, and forget the existence of stoves. Yet the trees may still be bare, the wind keen, and the Elbe filled with ice-floes from her mountain streams. There comes, however, a few hours of sunshine, a gentle shower, and almost in a night the trees in the Grosse Garten leap from bud to leaf, the standard lilacs of the Zwinger fill the air with purple radiance, and the season of the "Baumbliithe" is at hand. At this period the whole neighbourhood is transformed into one vast paradise of cherry, peach, and apple-blossom. The natives of all classes have a pretty Arcadian custom of making pilgrimage in their thousands to view the "Baumbliithe," thronging the excursion trains and steamers that run hourly to the most famous orchard valleys.

Now that we are keeping the great public festival of spring, and the sky wakes blue and serene morning after morning, "Ausflüge" and "Landpartien" are the order of the day. The Saxon Landpartie, or picnic, is no small undertaking. Starting at eight or nine a.m. for some picturesque spot in Saxon Switzerland, the company, on reaching their destination, walk unweariedly through deep pine forests and climb steep rocks till sunset, winding up, perhaps, with an impromptu dance at a restaurant, and a journey home by moonlight. While revelling in the natural beauties of the Bastai, Lillienstein, or Schandau, we must not neglect to make a pilgrimage to Meissen, the home of Dresden china. Here we may see the raw clay twirled, juggler fashion, into plates and dishes, or pinched by dexterous fingers into wreaths of daintiest flowers; or in the painting-room we may watch the artists transforming the cold, white plaques into Watteau landscapes and copies of old masterpieces. At night the Brühlische Terrasse is our favourite resort. Here we may sit and watch the lights that edge the river, and listen to Mendelssohn's "Frühlingslied" played by the string band in the Belvedere, mingling amicably with the Pilgrims' Chorus from "Tannhäuser" boomed out by the military band across the water, while, ever and anon, rise the strains of Strauss's "Rosen aus dem Suden," from the Italienischer Dorf by the water-side.

But spring, alas! does not stay for ever, and as soon as she has fairly given way to summer there is a general exodus from the town. The heat has become intense, the theatres are closed, and even our teachers have gone into Sommerlogis. There is nothing for it but to say farewell to the City of Porcelain and the whole pleasant land of Saxony. Yet not farewell, but rather "au revoir," for though Dresden can boast no Well of Trevi, all who have once dwelt within her hospitable walls, watched the moon rise above her towers, listened to her music, gazed upon her pictures, and tasted of her beer, need no further or more potent spell to charm their footsteps back again.

MY MYSTERIOUS MODEL

IN TWO PARTS. PART II

It was at the end of the fourth week—one just one short month. The picture was almost finished; but that I dreaded to pronounce my own sentence and put an end to this new, fuller, and richer life, I should have said entirely finished; and it stood there all ready framed, waiting, wilfully delayed, until the very last moment when it might safely be sent in. We had done little else but talk that day. I had scarcely attempted more than the most transparent pretence of work, until I went myself for the customary tray, and on my return found her as usual standing before the picture. She was so absorbed that I drew quite close to her, and had time to notice her intent air of almost rapturous exaltation.

"It is almost as fascinating as a mirror, is it not?" I said, rather jealously, though I was pleased that she should take so evident an interest in my work.

"Oh, I was not——" she began, startled, and as though about to enter some disclaimer; then stopped suddenly, confused, as she added, somewhat tritely: "yes, it is very nice. I do so hope it may be successful."

"I have faith in your having brought me good fortune," I returned, and I needed all my resolution to resist falling at her feet and straightway pouring out all my love and longing, my mad infatuation, in short, in a flood of burning, passionate words.

Fortunately—as I have since learned to think it—Marta, the slumbering maid,

woke up with a start, and came forward to help me with the tray.

I watched for a time as she sat absently trifling with her cup and spoon before, becoming conscious of my earnest regard, she exclaimed, suddenly:

"I suppose this is the last time I shall need to—to come?"

"The picture is going to-morrow," I answered, avoiding a more direct reply, as I was hoping to avoid the necessity.

"Yes, that is what I—I meant," she assented.

"Yes, it will have to go to-morrow, though I could have worked at it willingly for at least another month."

"As I could have sat," she answered, inadvertently, and with her eyes still turned towards the canvas; "that is—had it been necessary."

Then it was I ventilated a long-cherished purpose.

"I was hoping," I began, anxiously, as I took the cover from another canvas and turned it to the light, "you might have been willing to—to let me finish—this," and I showed her a smaller replica about half the size.

"Why, how is that? Have you painted another?" and she rose from her seat to take a nearer view.

"I have not been able to finish it yet, as you see; but one or two sittings," I urged, artfully and insidiously, "would make it quite complete."

"But—why paint two?" she asked, ignoring, that is, if she understood, my suggestion.

"Because this one—if only you would let me finish it, so as to make it the more worthy of your acceptance—I thought—perhaps——"

"But I don't understand. Do you mean that you are painting that for me? Oh, indeed no, you are too good! How could I possibly accept it? It must be worth ever so much——"

"To be worth your acceptance—yes, I know; that is the reason I wish to finish it. Think of what you have done for me, and what my picture would have been without you!"

"But you do not know. I did that to——" and once more she stopped in confusion.

Here I should perhaps set down that I was as far from fathoming any possible motive my fair model may have had in seeking me out as I had been on the day she first came; nor, to tell the truth,

had I troubled myself greatly to enquire. Was it not enough that she was—what I knew her to be—gracious and kindly, and beautiful withal? I was too much enthralled by the sweetness of her presence, and too much absorbed by my dreams of her in absence, to waste the precious moments wondering whence she came or why. But now that my great work was accomplished, and I had begun to anticipate with a sickening dread, a terrible sinking of the heart, what a hideous blank my life must become when she should have passed from it—to leave merely the memory of her sojourn behind like some subtle and impalpable perfume—I was full of conflicting doubts and fears.

Certainly it could have been no mere vanity, the desire to be painted, talked of, and admired; for never was a creature so richly endowed more entirely free from the taint of such a weakness. Nor could I—nor yet, honestly, did I—ever dare to flatter myself that she came out of any lingering regard for myself. This I maintain, although I am aware that, whether truly or not I cannot say, the most like me are held to be supported under their affliction by a more than normal share of self-appreciation, which by shallow thinkers has been too readily assumed as allotted them by way of compensation. As though the very growth itself were not a proof of what they must have suffered and endured to have fostered it. But, be that as it may, I had never dared indulge the fancy, but had always looked on her as the “something afar from the sphere of my sorrow,” which, however my desire might lead me to worship, I could never hope to win. Now, however, that I was so near to losing her, I began to speculate as to whether, when the last sitting was over, she must inevitably and completely pass from my life, or whether I might not, “like the moth,” still be permitted to gaze on “my star.” That she had grown, well, not to dislike me, and, if not to forget, had, to say the least, accustomed herself to much in me which to many people—whether happily or unhappily constituted, who shall decide?—proved an effectual barrier to all beyond a shuddering sympathy, I could readily believe, and had had a thousand proofs; but, ah me!

The little more, and how much it is.
The little less, and what worlds away.

While,

Oh, love, my love, had you loved but me!

rang the burden of my inward cry, as I gazed on her countless physical perfections, in such bitter contrast to my own lack of all that might have recommended me to her. At the same time that I recalled, with a still more bitter pang, not very far removed from absolute despair, the innumerable points of sympathy and accord we had discovered in our rapidly developed intimacy; for I think she had learned to look upon me in an altogether impersonal light, to forget the artist—as man, save the mark!—in his work.

Still, I had gained something from my manoeuvre; the evil day had been postponed, if only for a time. After first objecting that my friend—to whose existence, by the way, neither of us had ever previously referred—would soon be coming back? she had yielded, after a fashion, to my strongly urged desire for two or three more sittings at the most, always provided that by so doing she would not disturb him—meaning Herriott. I assured her that by arrangement we could easily have the studio to ourselves as heretofore. But no, neither did that altogether please her. She could not consent to at all interfere with his pleasure, or with his work, in any way. Rather than that—but here she had faltered, and turned away; and then it was, I think, that the first chill foreboding of a something that stood between us gave the final blow to any half-starved and weakling hope I may, perhaps, unconsciously have cherished. What it could be I was far from understanding, even when she went on to repeat:

“Rather than that I will come whether he—your friend, I mean—is here or not; that is, if you think he would not mind, really, you know, or think it odd and unconventional; and—yes, if you are quite sure that, like you, he would respect my—my confidence.”

It was at the manner, rather than the matter, of these disjointed sentences that I chafed; why, I doubt if I could have said in so many words, but I was thoroughly disheartened and ill at ease, though I hastened to reassure her that in so far as her next visit was concerned, she need be under no misgivings, for I had heard from Herriott as recently as that very morning, and he had given me to understand that his home-coming would be deferred until the evening of that day week, the day already discussed and fixed upon as the earliest possible for the next sitting;

while, for the rest, why not leave them to take their chance? Why not take short views of life, I urged; feeling how terribly restricted my own outlook had suddenly become. Whereat, unaccountably enough, she showed herself not so much relieved as her previous manner had led me to expect.

Still, it was decided, and we were not to meet again for a week—a whole week—during which I sought such imperfect consolation as could be drawn from working steadily at my reproduction, every touch to which was given with a tenderness and a loving care which might alone have made of it a masterpiece. And in sober truth I was sanguine. Certainly it was the best thing I had ever done. Owing to the difference in scale, there was doubtless less of dash and decision; but there was far and away more delicacy and finish than in the original, and, given the further sittings which were still needed, I hoped to make it not unworthy of my subject.

Before the week was half over I was notified by the authorities that my picture would be hung, and was told, privately, hung well; and that it was pronounced by those best qualified to judge to be one of the pictures of the year.

I have the less hesitation in repeating this now because I have long since learned my limitations, and how, in painting it, I had touched a level which to my own thinking I have never quite reached since. It was as though I had painted in with each loving touch all the thwarted passion of my life, and had thereby secured an outlet, a relief, which otherwise I was to be eternally denied.

But better far to pass on quickly over that seemingly interminable week, through which my parched-up heart hungered and thirsted for the sight of my beloved, to pause only at the coming of the next sitting. The appointment was kept religiously; but—how I could not tell—there was an impalpable something, almost amounting to restraint, between us, and our relations were neither so frank nor spontaneous as of old. I was too full of conflicting doubts and fears to be quite myself, while she—Sappho, as I will still call her—was nervous and preoccupied; whether from an insight into, and a sympathy with, the disturbed state of my own feelings was not entirely clear. Certainly the action and reaction was mutual, and at last I could not paint; so was rather pleased to be interrupted by what I knew to be the post.

"You will excuse me?" I asked. "There may possibly be news from Herriott, my friend."

I went to the letter-box to bring back a good-sized package, which I went on to open as I walked back to my place. Inside was a large and very beautiful photograph of Herriott's sister, and with it a little note.

"As Frank is away, and I promised him this should meet him on his return, I have sent it to you. Kindly put it where he will be certain to find it, as I dare say you know how anxiously he awaits it, and why."

That was all. There was no signature and no address, and as just then there was a loud knocking at the locked door leading to the house, I handed them, both the note and enclosure, to my visitor as I hastened to answer it.

Outside I must have been detained longer than I knew, for when I looked at my watch I found I had been away fully a quarter of an hour, and I hurried back in a mood divided between annoyance with the fussy patron who had so detained me, and compunction for my neglected guest; only to find, when I reached the studio once more, that my visitor had gone. Evidently she had tired of waiting and left by the outer door.

How I anathematised my folly in leaving her alone! for, yes, now I may confess it—I had secretly determined at that interview, the last at which I could count on being undisturbed, no longer to "fear my fate too much," but to learn it, once for all. And now she had gone, leaving me to the Tantalus torture, the sickness of heart of this hope deferred—if hope it had ever really been.

So cast down was I, it was some little time before I came across the few lines she had left by way of explanation, and, it would appear, of leave-taking as well. This is what she had written:

"I should like to have seen you again, if only to have said good-bye; but I found I could not wait. As to the sittings, this must certainly be the last, for already I have taken up far too much of your time; while to wrong you further by accepting your beautiful picture would be to take it under the falsest of false pretences. Why I ever sat to you at all seems now almost incomprehensible. I wonder at myself, as the victim of some strange delusion, some wretched infatuation. But certainly, with reason or without, it was all done for my

own whim to serve my own ends entirely; and now it is over and done with, and had better be forgotten. Please try to understand and act on this. If, as you say, my sitting for you has been of service, try to set that against my first selfishness in coming to you. It is not likely we shall ever meet again, but I shall always gratefully remember your considerate kindness and delicacy to one who deserved neither. And now—good-bye!

"I admired the photograph very, very much."

That was all. No signature; no clue to the writer's real personality; and no sign of regret. I sank down before the picture and—

But there is no need to tell all my weakness—all my folly; already I have told too much, and grown tedious. What else could I have expected? Even to have hoped for more was the veriest madness, and how promptly was the longing punished!

We sat on then—Misery and I together, close companions now for many a long day—far into the twilight. My orders had been strict, and I was not disturbed until quite late I heard Herriott's voice outside, whereupon, like some wounded animal, I wanted to creep away and hide. But no; I could only try, and that vainly, to rouse myself in readiness to receive him.

He let himself in with his latch-key, and still I sat on, when, as he lit the gas, he started at seeing me. Possibly I looked white and ill, for he exclaimed anxiously:

"What on earth are you doing here all alone, and in the dark? Pale, too! Is anything the matter? Can I—"

"No—no, thanks. I—I am all right. A little—tired, I believe; but—what of yourself?"

"My dear fellow, don't try to humbug me! You are anything but 'all right,' and must have a glass of wine right away. I see how it is. You've had no one to look after you, and you've been going it again. You have half fagged yourself to death because I was away, and I'm only back just in time. Here, drink this. Come, no nonsense!"

I allowed him to run on, for it was the easiest way out of the difficulty, and let him suppose he was right. I tried to swallow the wine he had poured out, and after one or two abortive attempts succeeded.

"There, that is better," he exclaimed, brightly, and as though greatly relieved;

then added: "Now let us see what you have been doing."

And he turned to the picture.

The sound that forced itself from him was no exclamation in the ordinary sense of the word; it was more as though he met with a sudden difficulty in drawing his breath, after which he remained silent and motionless, gazing at my work for so long that at last I grew impatient.

"Well," I cried at length, "what do you think of it? Will it do?"

"Do—why—oh, the picture! Ah! we want a little more light on the subject before we can judge of that." And he set the strong top light all ablaze before he went on: "There, now we can see this—this Sappho of your dreams—see what and whom she is like."

And he sat down before the picture again, to recommence after a while:

"Yes, I have seen her look like that at times."

"You mean——"

"The woman who sat to you for that. She can both look and be very different when she pleases."

"Then you know her?"

"I am not sure that I do now. There was a time when I thought I did, and then again a later time when I was forced to doubt, and again make up my mind. Until now, looking at this, your presentment of her, I could almost doubt still."

"I have not half done her justice."

"What—then she has bewitched you?"

And Herriott laughed a short, hard laugh, while I—was thankful that his eyes were turned away from me. Still, I answered after a time:

"If you mean do I admire her, my answer lies there. Could I have painted even that unless——"

"And you think you have read her, riddle that she is, aright?" he interrupted, still with his eyes on the canvas.

"Again my answer is there—except that I have not been able to put in the half of what I saw. If——"

"My dear fellow, there is no 'if' about the case. You have succeeded only too well, and so has she. You have painted what was once my ideal of her, as well as your own. Have painted her as the truest and noblest of her sex, while really——"

"There, don't go on; don't speak ill of her by even a single word," I broke in, impetuously.

"No. You are right; and, besides, why

should I? Was it her fault? Is it ever a woman's fault when some poor weak fool takes her for something a 'little lower than the angels,' to find that she is only a woman after all? Oh, no; it was no fault of hers. Yet I could have staked my life on her truth——"

"As I would now," I interposed, steadily. "I don't in the least know what your grievance may be."

"But you decide, *ex parte*, against me. That is as it should be. I allow the judgement to go by default; I have no wish, not the very slightest, to make out a case. Confoundedly odd, too," he murmured, later, "that she should have allowed you to paint us together—so! One would have thought that common decency—but there, women are cruel at times, if only to be kind."

And he laughed his doubtful laugh again; then turned away to say:

"And so Sappho is hung, and on the line! Well, it is no more than you deserve. The next thing will be the cheque in—well, how many figures shall we say? And this also. What do you mean to ask for this?"

"Oh, that one is not for sale," I answered as indifferently as I could; whereat we both learned that there was something which each would do well to avoid, and we talked a little at random, and with an effort, of his late journey, of his sister, of anything, in fact, for a time, except of what lay nearest to our hearts, until finally, to our mutual relief, we separated for the night.

Soon after came the private view, and Herriott persuaded me to join the crowd. At first I refused, but nothing would serve but we must go together.

He was soon claimed and carried off by his many friends, but I was little known, so moved about as fancy led me, unnoticed and alone. I was not tall enough, nor yet aggressive enough, to see the more popular pictures, except by waiting patiently until gradually I gravitated to the front. I suppose it was only human to feel a slight exulting thrill as I found myself on the fringe of a crowd, larger and more closely packed than any I had seen, and realised that the centre of attraction was Sappho—my Sappho!

As I stood there hesitating whether or not I should wait among the rest or pass on, a low, clear voice from behind caused me a still deeper and more lasting tremor, as I recognised the well-remembered tones of my model herself. Evidently she

was answering her companion's previous challenge, the meaning of which I could gather though I had not heard the words.

"Yes; I have seen Sappho, and I have no wish to deny—anything."

Then followed the other voice, which was also a woman's, and equally low, yet penetrating, surcharged as it was with an intention I could not but feel.

"And you—sat for that—to the artist. Don't you think that was just the least in the world——" And the speaker paused as though fast for a word, then went on without it: "But there, I don't suppose you will think anything of the kind. You were always a little gone on Art, and its professors—especially the professors. This is the same one, I suppose, though I hoped I had saved you from that."

There was a still deeper vibration in my sitter's voice as she answered:

"Then it is you whom I have to thank."

"Not at all, you need not thank me. I acted purely in your interest, of course; but thanks are quite unnecessary—between you and me. Then again it was scarcely any trouble." And there was a studied deliberation, a calculated distinctness, about the next few words. "Pity it was not more effectual! Yet he professed to quite agree with me at the time, when I put it to him plainly how very, very rich you were, while he—well, you know what he was, and still is, for anything one knows."

"And you told him that—what—what did he say? Oh, what would he think—of me!" but this last was little louder than a sigh.

"Oh, he admitted it all. Was it my fault if, in spite of my protestations, he chose to fancy the warning came from you? Possibly I did not protest as strongly as, at that time, you would have had me, or would have done, perhaps, yourself. When he taxed me with it, you know, I was obliged to admit that we had talked him over together."

"You mean—you had talked," interposed the other, coldly. "You know I never said a word."

"Nor was there any necessity. It was all perfectly true, and he—well, he was gentleman enough to feel it for himself; so that in spite of your infatuation you were saved; but now, I suppose, it has all begun again, as bad, or worse than ever."

"By what right do you ask?"

"Oh, what need is there to ask? Is it not plain enough that, this time, you have sought him—allowed him to paint you for every one to see? They will say you ran after him."

So far I had heard, because I could not well get away from the crowd—nay, to be honest, I am not sure that I had tried very hard, for the music of my Sappho's voice had held me like a spell. Now, however, the crowd began to fade away, and I must go with it or be seen; and, moreover, I had heard quite enough, so turned and slipped away. But I was too late, my model spoke again:

"It does not concern either you or me, perhaps, but you are under some mistake; if you mean Mr. Herriott, I—I believe he is—engaged. But the artist who painted Sappho—is there. I will introduce him if you choose."

"What! you sat to that little horror? you let him paint you— Oh, my dear, whatever could have possessed you? But, at least you stand excused; no one could suspect you for a moment of running after a thing like that!"

The words were supposed to be spoken in a whisper, but I heard them, every one. As I turned to glance reassuringly at Sappho, I saw her turn crimson with shame and mortification; and not to make matters worse I stole quietly away.

So, then, my dream was over, and I was awake at last.

It was not so much the cruel words as the double cruelty of the situation that bore me down, as I realised how pitifully weak I had been to "hope against hope" after all. Ah, well! that was all done with now. So much at least was clear.

But, was it so clear, so impossible, I wondered. Still more weakly next, while some old line about "hearts caught on the rebound" recurred to me—as though my presumption had not been sufficiently cauterised already. And for a moment I forgot friendship, and Frank, and honour as the subtle temptation overpowered me and carried me away, and I began to piece out the threads I held in my hands. They two were hopelessly estranged—through no fault of theirs, whispered pity—and certainly through none of mine, echoed self. Rather was it the work of that female Iago of a friend who had played upon the man's pride; while she, Sappho, had made her one attempt to bridge the gulf which had stretched itself between them by showing her willingness to be

associated, if only on canvas, with him. Then I saw Sappho, sensitive and proud, who had risked something already, as her friend had so kindly pointed out, even in sitting to me, only to find, as she thought, she had ventured all in vain. The photograph to her, in her anomalous position, could bear but one interpretation. She was too late! She could only retreat—with honour. She would never venture again; while I—I who loved her—was the only one who knew both sides, the only one who could interfere, and so pronounce my own irrevocable doom.

And, pitiful waverer that I was, while I hesitated, the unconscious Frank came to me with a laugh.

"Well, old lion, you will have to leave your den—everybody begs to be introduced; while you, you look as though some calamity had befallen you, instead of having just achieved the one desire of your life."

"Oh, hush!" I cried, not daring to trust myself to think. "Go—go to her! She is there! It was all a mistake! She loves you, I know—never mind how. Tell her," here I had an inspiration, "that you are not engaged, for that is what she thought, and—"

But he had gone—to crown his life with happiness. While I—had only Art!

THE THIRTEENTH BRYDAIN.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "Mr. Wingrove's Wages," "The Vicar's Aunt," "Dick's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. KINGSTON was famous for her small dinner-parties. "So very select," some of her friends said; "so friendly and sociable," others remarked. From which it may be inferred that she chose her guests with great care; and took care that those chosen should please each other. Her cook was excellent. Dr. Kingston held a theory that to inferior cooking most of the ills both of human flesh and spirit were traceable; and the result of his theory and his wife's practice, through the medium of her cook, drove many an excellent matron to despair.

One of these dinner-parties had taken place on an evening early in May, four or five days after the Private View. It had been no exception to the rule; indeed, it

had been unusually pleasant. It had consisted of a husband and wife, musical people; two women, a novelist and her very pretty daughter; a young barrister, and a famous tenor. The Kingstons' "set" was composed of all kinds of people; and a considerable contingent was drawn from the artistic world.

The two last-named guests had apparently found the evening very pleasant; for when all the other guests, after keeping their carriages as long as possible, had at length departed, they had seemed in no hurry to do so likewise; and had, on their host's invitation, very readily adjourned to his smoking-room, for what he called "a quiet cigarette" with himself and Keith Brydain.

Dr. Kingston's smoking-room was a little square room on the ground floor, leading out of his large and comfortable consulting-room.

"I like to be near my work-room," he was wont to say; "I feel more at home here than I should anywhere else."

The smoking-room was furnished with the plainness to be looked for from a practical man, the only luxuries being two or three comfortable arm-chairs and a very good Turkey carpet. But neither the arm-chairs nor a wicker lounging-chair, which had been drawn near them, were occupied at this moment. It was between twelve and one; the "quiet cigarettes," combined with conversation, had been going on for more than an hour, and the two guests had just made a move, and they and their host and Brydain stood round the fire, which was comfortable enough, even on a May night, interchanging a few last words.

Dr. Kingston stood at one end of the mantelshelf, leaning his elbow on it and flicking the burnt part of his cigarette off against the edge of a bronze. He was a man of about fifty-eight, with keen, clever eyes, and a very strong mouth and chin. His face and his movements alike were characteristic. The slow, consciously capable way in which his hands performed even that trifling action, showed, as clearly as his expression, that he was a man who possessed power, and what is rarer, the gift of using it.

Mr. Lennard, the tenor, who stood at the opposite end to his host, was a curious contrast to him. He possessed a mobile, characteristically artistic expression, which was implanted on features which were not at all strong. It was talent and good fortune which had placed Oscar Lennard in the

front rank among men; he would never have had the strength to carve his own way to it. But in the front rank he undoubtedly was. He was a great friend of the whole Kingston family, more especially, perhaps, of the master of it. Dr. Kingston and Lennard were always engrossed, after a few moments' intercourse, in the closest argument; the link that bound them together being a common taste—curious enough in Lennard—for scientific research. He had sung to-night, to Mrs. Kingston's great contentment. It was, as he sometimes reminded her, a privilege which scarcely any one else shared with her. Lennard only sang, he said, for his oldest friends.

"Well," he said suddenly, breaking a little silence which had followed the end of a long discussion between him and Dr. Kingston, "I must really be going. I've got some work to get through to-morrow, and it's half-past twelve by your time, Kingston."

"I believe my time is correct," said Dr. Kingston, with a little smile as strong as the lips that formed it; "but don't hurry, Lennard."

"I must," said the other. "I'll go and get into my coat at once, before you tempt me any more." Lennard turned round and threw his cigarette end into the fire. "Good night," he said, holding out his hand to the young barrister, who had been standing a little in the back-ground talking to Brydain. And then he turned to Brydain. "Good night, Mr. —, I didn't quite catch your name? Brydain — thanks. Good night, Mr. Brydain, and don't forget what I said to you. If you ever want to make any money out of that voice of yours, come to me. I'll put you in the way. What's more, I'd teach you. I hate teaching, and you would want no end; but it would be well worth your while to get it—from me or any one else you like better, for that matter. Good night."

"Good night," Brydain answered. "Thank you," he added, simply, and without much apparent interest; "you are very good."

Mr. Lennard went into the hall followed by his host; and Edward Tredennis, the young barrister, prepared rather reluctantly to follow his example.

"Good night," he said to Brydain. "I've got some work to do, too, and mine must be polished off by breakfast time. I hope we shall meet again. You're staying here?"

Tredennis was a short man; one of those under-sized men who look middle-aged, even in their youth. He was about five-and-thirty, and had gained by hard work and considerable ability a very fair position in his profession. He had a plain, clever, and slightly cynical face, with light-grey eyes, which looked frankly into Brydain's face as he spoke. Brydain answered their gaze with another, quite as frank.

"Yes," he said. "I hope we shall."

Then Edward Tredennis followed his fellow-guest, and Brydain was left alone by the now dying fire. He poked the ashes about with his foot; and wondered why they were taking so very long to say good night, and when his uncle would come back. A moment or two later the voices in the hall ceased suddenly; the front door shut with a heavy thud, and Dr. Kingston came back.

He mixed himself a glass of whisky, from a tray on the table, and handed Brydain some.

But he did not sit down. He came back to his former position by the mantel-shelf.

"Keith," he said, abruptly, as he set his glass down, "what do you think of what Lennard says? Eh!"

Brydain, who had been thinking of Tredennis, answered, vaguely:

"Mr. Lennard? I don't quite know what you mean."

"What he said to you about your voice just now, my dear fellow. It seems he said something to you earlier in the evening, too."

"Oh, yes; he was very kind about my singing."

"Kind!" said Dr. Kingston, with an amused twinkle in his eyes. "Lennard isn't the sort of man to make you pretty speeches, Keith. He meant every word he said!"

At the beginning of the evening Brydain had sung. He had demurred slightly when his aunt first asked him to do so. But she had insisted, and Brydain had instantly given in, and with a simple acquiescence. He had sung an old Scotch song, playing his own accompaniment.

His singing was an accomplishment of which Brydain had thought very little. All his life he had sung, in his own way, to his father, to Mackenzie, to any one who asked him, or to himself, for simple pleasure in it. It had always seemed to him that his voice was just the outcome of an ordinary instinct, much the same as any

other instinct. He had been greatly surprised, on his former visits to London, that his aunt and cousins had wished to hear him sing; and he was still more surprised this evening when, at the end of his song, Mr. Lennard sauntered up to him and asked him to sing again. But Brydain had not given the request, or the tersely expressed commendation which followed the second song, another thought until now.

Now he looked up at his uncle with wonder in his face.

"It was very good of him," he repeated.

"My dear Keith," said Dr. Kingston, brusquely, but not at all unkindly, "suppose you were to look at this thing practically. Lennard has been talking to me in the hall. I gather from what he says, that your fortune lies before you, if you like to work."

"To work!" repeated Keith, quite incomprehendingly.

"Yes. He tells me that with a year's work you might——"

"To sing in public, do you mean?" interrupted Brydain, with a sudden comprehension. "Oh, but he can't have been thinking what he was saying. My voice is nothing, nothing at all! I don't see how such a swell as that could have made such a mistake."

His face was quite flushed with the haste with which he spoke.

"Is 'such a swell as that' likely to make a mistake, do you think?" responded Dr. Kingston, briefly. "He says you have a finer quality of voice than any he has met in all his experience. He knows—that's all I can say."

The look of incredulity and amaze left Brydain's eyes slowly; the excited flush died out of his cheeks; he looked steadily at the fire, and there was a silence.

"But," he said, slowly, after a pause, "if, as you say, it is true, and I suppose you and he know, I don't see what I can do. I don't see that I could become a professional singer."

"What's against it?" asked his uncle.

Brydain paused again.

"It's—a rather unusual career, isn't it?" he said at length, with some hesitation.

"An odd sort of way of earning one's——"

Dr. Kingston interrupted him quickly.

"Come to the point quicker, my dear fellow; it saves time. What you mean is that you don't think it would befit the Laird of Brydain to sing for his supper; in fact, you don't think it's gentlemanly to be an artist?"

"Yes," Brydain assented, rather reluctantly; "something of that sort."

"You've met Lennard," was all Dr. Kingston said in answer. "He is an excellent example of the modern type of artist. There are dozens who are like him—not in voice," he interpolated, hastily, "but in birth, breeding, manners. You find him up to your standard?" he asked, drily.

"Oh, he's a gentleman, without doubt, but——"

Brydain stopped speaking, without ending his sentence; and Dr. Kingston gave a little movement, expressive both of eagerness and reflection. He had, as he had promised Brydain in his letter to him that he would do, exerted himself considerably to find some channel into which the young man's energies could be directed with advantage; but it was not an easy task. Brydain, anxious and eager as he was to undertake it, was without any obvious aptitude or definite training for work of any sort; and all their conversations on the subject, and all Dr. Kingston's enquiries and investigations since Brydain's arrival, had ended in a vague unsatisfactoriness and indefiniteness. With Mr. Lennard's words to-night, therefore, it had suddenly seemed to Dr. Kingston that he saw the first chance of an opening for Brydain, and he was determined to use it, if possible, on his behalf.

"Now look here, Keith," Dr. Kingston said, "I don't want to force your inclinations—you know I don't, my dear fellow—but you want to live in London and do some sort of work. Now, it was only this morning that we came to a final agreement that there was scarcely any career open to you because of your want of definite training and your age. To this, neither of these things makes any difference. You can begin your training at once; get it in a year; Lennard brings you forward, and your fortune's made. I say, again, I don't for a moment want to force your inclinations; but think it well over, my boy, before you turn away luck—it's rare enough. I can't let you throw it away for want of knowledge of the world."

Brydain lifted his face from the grey ashes which he had been studying intently while his uncle spoke.

"I'll think it over," he said, very slowly and reflectively; "think it well over."

CHAPTER VII.

THE drawing-room of the Kingstons' house in Weymouth Street was on the

first floor. It was the characteristic drawing-room of a London house of its size and architecture, running right through the house from front to back, and forming two parts, divided by curtains. In itself the room was rather gloomy. The windows were small for the size of the room, the cornices and panelling rather heavy.

But any trace of gloomy outline was completely hidden by the influence of its pretty, tasteful fittings. These were in no way strikingly original; on the contrary, they were strikingly conventional and modern; but, fortunately, modern taste is good at present, and the Kingstons' room was an excellent example of the best.

The panelling, which was old, and ran from the wainscot to the ceiling in lines, was coloured a warm ivory white, and the draperies in between each panel were blue. The effect was excellent, and was enhanced by the carefully chosen harmonising blue of the furnishings. These were also of the best and most modern; and their stiffness was broken by several thoroughly comfortable-looking lounges and easy-chairs, which looked as if they were in constant use. The air of the room was sweet with flowers, which were in every available place. There were books and magazines lying about on little tables; soft cushions in the chairs and sofas; and altogether the aspect of the whole room was quite as comfortable and inviting-looking as it was correct.

In the back drawing-room a bow-window had been thrown out, in which Tiny had constructed for herself a little fernery. The window was low, and caught most of the afternoon sun in the spring and early summer; and on the May afternoon, about half-past five, when Mrs. Kingston and the two girls were sitting together in the larger room, a ray of sunshine started through the bow-window, and, catching every bright bit of colour on its way, ended on Tiny's golden head. She had been wearing a large black hat, which she had thrown on the ground beside her, and she was tying her gloves into knots with a reflective little air.

Rachel and Mrs. Kingston were also in their outdoor things. They had all three just come in from a morning concert. A table, holding a tea equipage, as pretty and as harmonious as every other detail in the room, stood in front of Mrs. Kingston; but the three had evidently finished tea, and were talking, or, rather, had been talking, for there was a silence reigning at the moment.

Mrs. Kingston broke it by saying, as she took the tea-cosy from the sofa at her side and put it over the teapot:

"We'll keep some tea for him in case he comes in in time."

"Then, mother," said Rachel, thoughtfully, and as if going back to a subject that had been already discussed, "he has really decided, has he?"

"He told your father last night that he was going to Mr. Lennard to-day about it; and he went out just before we did. I imagine he must have gone to him now."

"I never dreamt that Keith's voice was so good as that," continued Rachel. "I hadn't the least idea that Mr. Lennard thought so either."

"Well, it was only last Saturday, you see, that he was here—just a week ago—and Keith asked your father not to say anything about it until he had thought it over carefully."

"And now he has thought it over carefully, I suppose," broke in Tiny, "and decided. Well, I'm very excited indeed that he has! I always wanted some one belonging to us to do something nice—something talented, and make a success!"

"Wait till you see if Keith does make a success," said Rachel, cautiously.

"Oh, but he will. I know he will," said Keith's younger cousin, excitedly. "He's that sort!"

"He will work hard, certainly," said her mother, "if that is what you mean by 'that sort,' Tiny."

"What is he going to do? Where will he live?" went on Tiny. "Here?"

"No; not here. We should be only too glad to keep him, if he wished; but he told your father—and he is right, of course—that he could not work hard here. He thinks of taking rooms, I believe."

"Well, he couldn't very well sing hard for hours here. That is what he will have to do for some time, doubtless." Rachel smiled a little as she spoke. "The idea of Keith, shut up alone in a room with a piano, singing exercises, seems so incongruous, somehow!" she added.

"Mother," said Tiny, suddenly, "what made Keith come to London? I was wondering the other day. I mean, why need he work? Why doesn't he just stay in Scotland and be Laird of Brydain like his father!"

Mrs. Kingston settled herself comfortably against the sofa cushions and unfastened her mantle. If there was one thing she liked more than another, it was a conver-

sation which demanded much explanation on her part; in plainer words, she greatly liked to be asked questions. But to thoroughly enjoy answering them, she needed much deliberation and comfort. It was to this end that she went through the aforesaid preliminaries.

"Well, I really don't quite understand, Tiny," she began. "He wrote, as you know, to your father, when his father died, and said he wanted to come to town and work, and asked if your father could help him find something to do."

"I know," put in Tiny. "I heard bits of that letter. What I don't see is, why he wants something to do."

"I can't altogether explain it, Tiny. There is no absolute need for him to find anything to do. His income is enough to live on, I think. It is not large, though, and I suppose he wanted to improve it."

"I should think it was fearfully dull in that Scotch place of his. Fancy living all your whole life, more or less, by yourself. He told me yesterday that their nearest neighbours lived seven miles away!"

Rachel gave a little shrug to her shoulders and a twist to one of her bangles as she spoke. She herself, sitting there in the pretty drawing-room, with her well-made frock and the general air of conventionality about her, certainly did not look as if she could find life endurable under such conditions. Not that Rachel Kingston was empty or shallow; she was simply a woman of the day, who had had a pleasant existence for all her twenty-four years of life with so many outside social resources, that she had never been compelled to draw upon her own.

"I don't think there was enough for him to do there," continued Mrs. Kingston, carrying on her explanation with a sort of tacit interweaving of Rachel's comment into the texture. "There could not possibly be enough to fill a young man's time at Brydain. Keith said that there were really no responsibilities belonging to his property; and I don't see how there could be; for there are only about a dozen cottages in the whole village, I believe. So your father told me. He went there once, years ago."

She paused, gave her cushion a little pull, and looked at the clock. "Keith is very late in coming in," she said, in a sort of parenthesis, while Tiny, with a word or two to a pretty Persian kitten which had crept purring into the room, poured out for it a saucer of cream.

"There is another thing, "she went on, rather slowly; "it sounds too ridiculous to put into words, and certainly too ridiculous to be noticed; but there is some sort of old tradition connected with the Brydain family; and your father thinks, from something Keith said to him—something entirely incidental—that it was partly to—that this had something to do in Keith's mind with his leaving home."

"A tradition!" exclaimed Tiny, suddenly letting fall the kitten's fluffy tail with which she had been playing. "What sort of tradition!"

"You never said anything about it!" exclaimed Rachel at the same moment.

"I did not, and, indeed, I do not now, know anything to say. It is only, as far as I can make out, some sort of idea that Keith is to be the last of his family."

"The last of his family!" Tiny echoed in a little gasp.

"There is some sort of old-world nonsense to that effect believed in Brydain. It's too absurd, but you know how ridiculously superstitious Scotch people are. Possibly it depressed Keith's spirits a trifle. That sort of thing will get on one's nerves, you know. It's very sensible of him to have come away, in any case."

All the time her mother spoke Tiny had been looking at her with an excited light in her eyes, and she now bent eagerly forward to echo her mother's words for the second time.

"Old-world nonsense!" she said, breathlessly; "do tell us more about it. It does sound so—erie—I can't believe Keith has anything so exciting belonging to him."

"How ridiculous you are, Tiny," said Rachel, calmly. "As if any of those absurd old prophecies, and so forth, were worth the slightest credence. I suppose this is some old prophecy," she said, turning to her mother.

"I really do not know," Mrs. Kingston answered. "I have only the faintest idea of it. I think your father heard something, or was told something; I don't know when."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Tiny, as Mrs. Kingston paused with the air of one who has said all that is to be said, or, indeed, that is necessary to be said; "mother, how unsatisfactory of you not to know any more. Why didn't you ask father? Oh, why didn't you? I do call it unenterprising."

"I don't think your father knows much

more than I do," responded her mother, placidly. "He didn't give it a second thought, I should say."

"You are both dreadful," said Tiny. "I shall ask Keith," she added, excitedly. "I must hear all about it."

"You'll be very silly if you do. It's not worth while, and, besides, people are often sensitive on——" But Rachel broke off suddenly.

"Here he is!" exclaimed the two girls simultaneously.

A man's step was heard on the stairs outside. A moment later, the drawing-room door opened, and Brydain entered.

He was not looking nearly so worn or haggard as he had looked on that evening when he walked into the park alone, after the Private View; and his face was different also from what it had been on the night of the dinner-party. Then he had looked harassed, depressed, and perplexed; now his whole face was alight with eager interest and excitement, and there was an expression both of decision and of relief about his eyes and mouth. With a smile, in answer to the greeting of the two girls, he sat down in the nearest chair, drawing it, as he did so, a little nearer to Mrs. Kingston.

"Yes, I am very late," he said, in answer to her fear that the tea was quite cold.

"No," as Tiny stretched out her hand at her mother's bidding to ring the bell for more, "no, I've had tea, thanks, aunt; Lennard had some going, and insisted on my staying. That's why I am so late."

"You have been to see Mr. Lennard?" said Mrs. Kingston, with an interest in her tone that made her words less a question than a sympathetic comment.

"Yes, indeed I have. Been to see him, and settled it all. Uncle Dick has told you, of course, all about it? I asked him to tell you I had made up my mind."

"He told me what your idea was; and hearing from him that you had practically decided, I told Rachel and Tiny half an hour ago."

"Decided! Yes, I've quite decided. I'm very excited about my future career. Rachel and Tiny, do wish me success as a singer to the British public!"

"With all my heart!" said Rachel, cordially.

And Tiny added:

"I'm quite as excited as you. And I'm longing to come and hear you sing in St. James's Hall!"

"You'll have to wait a little," said Brydain, laughing. "But Lennard is most kind; he is very encouraging. Indeed, he says I shall get on."

A faint flush came over Brydain's face with the words.

"Don't blush!" cried Tiny, mischievously. "I know he said heaps of nicer things than that."

"He was encouraging," repeated Brydain, simply; "and I'm going to him for my first lesson on Wednesday. I must go and look about for some rooms to-morrow," he said, turning to Mrs. Kingston. "You don't know how awfully sorry I shall be to go away."

"You won't go far," cried Tiny; "and we shall come and call. And you'll be a swell, such a swell, Keith! I shall be afraid of you!"

"Wait till I am, and then see," he responded, laughingly. "I can't tell you," he went on, turning again to Mrs. Kingston, "how glad I am to have it all settled. It's such a satisfaction to feel as if one were really on the way to find one's niche in the world, and do some work in the niche, I hope," he added, rather more slowly.

There was a ring of seriousness in his voice as he spoke, and partly with one of those odd turns of reaction that sometimes fall on the most lively conversation, partly from the influence of Keith's tone, a little silence fell on the four people in the pretty drawing-room. The ray of sun had left Tiny's head some little time before; but it happened now to catch Brydain's face. It lighted up the glow of enthusiasm and energetic resolve that shone in his dark blue eyes, and it seemed to intensify the content and satisfaction that were glowing in every line of it. Brydain looked, what indeed he was, happier than he had ever been since his father's death.

All at once Tiny, who had been gazing

abstractedly at the sky, visible above her ferns, through the back drawing-room window, turned to Brydain with a sudden movement:

"Oh, Keith," she said, "Cousin Keith, do tell me something. I'd nearly forgotten, I was so excited about your singing; but I do so want to know."

"I'll tell you anything I can, after that earnest request," laughed Brydain, rousing himself and facing Tiny smilingly. "What is it?"

"Mother says—yes, mother, you said you thought so—that you've got some awfully thrilling old tradition belonging to your family history. Do tell it me. Is it a ghostly tradition, or what is it?"

Tiny turned her dancing, excited eyes full on Brydain; then all at once she started and turned a little white. His face had absolutely and entirely changed. The smile was gone as completely as though it had never been; he was very pale, and his lips trembled, though his eyes suddenly flashed.

"It's—nothing," he said, in a hoarse voice, which was at the same time cold and stern. "I don't know what you mean, Tiny."

There was a moment's brief silence, very different to the silence that had preceded it—a silence of intense awkwardness and confusion, during which Tiny's face changed to a burning, embarrassed crimson. And then Brydain rose hastily.

"I—you will excuse me," he said, abruptly, and went towards the door. He let himself out hurriedly, and closed the door behind him with a hasty click.

Alone on the landing outside, he stood quite still for a moment, his face far more haggard than it had been in the park.

"Is that nonsense going to follow me everywhere?" he said, between his teeth. Then he rapidly mounted the stairs to his own room.

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